In 1989, the Commission submitted a report on the implementation of the Council resolution (1), which found that some Member States had taken steps to introduce the cards, notably Germany, Luxembourg and Portugal. Circulation of the card remained limited and its use was practically non-existent. As a result, no significant progress has been made regarding the generalised introduction of the European emergency health card.

The discussion on the introduction of a health card has received new impetus through the development of electronic cards. In 1996, the Commission published a working paper on European health cards (2) which indicated the important political, legal, administrative, technical and ethical issues to be tackled before Community-wide introduction could be contemplated. It also pointed to several promising avenues such as application for reimbursement purposes and enabling communication between a patient’s doctor and the medical establishment and the authorised consultation of medical records.

Introduction and use in the Community of smart cards in general are key elements of the Europe initiative announced at the Lisbon European Council in March 2000. In the context of the Community’s research and technological development programme, a concerted action had been undertaken since 1993 to harmonise the use of patient data cards for administrative, clinical and emergency applications in Europe.

This was followed by a feasibility study in 1996 in the context of co-operation with the group of seven most industrialised countries.

Pilot studies have been launched in Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan. It is expected that their results will feed into the further development of smart cards under the eEurope initiative.

(1) OJ C 184, 23.7.1986.
(2) SEC(89) 1628 final.
(3) SEC(96) 1959.

(2001/C 113 E/043) WRITTEN QUESTION E-1889/00
by Elly Plooij-van Gorsel (ELDR) to the Commission
(16 June 2000)

Subject: Policy and expenditure on ICT in the European Union’s external and development policy

The Internet has created numerous new opportunities, not only in such fields as education and health care but also with regard to such issues as human rights, democratisation, the environment, the structure of society and free access to information. The spread of the Internet and of worldwide telecommunications technologies also holds out the prospect of new methods of learning which can be adapted to meet the needs of developing countries. In the increasingly successful economies of South-East Asia, there is already a high percentage of private investment, most of it effected through the market.

1. Does the Commission agree that ICT ought to be among the priorities of the European Union’s development policy? If so, can it give examples of projects?

2. What percentage of development aid is specifically devoted to education in the field of Information and Communication Technology?
Answer given by Mr Nielson on behalf of the Commission

(7 September 2000)

The Commission has suggested to the Group of Eight most industrialised countries (G8) launching the E-development initiative at the Okinawa Summit, just concluded. The E-development initiative seeks to promote the dialogue with developing countries aiming at their integration into the global economy. The Commission is ready to play its part and has in particular suggested a focus on three key areas: developing infrastructure and improving connectivity, fostering the provision of basic social services and building human capacity, encouraging market friendly policies and ensuring policy coherence.

Indeed the Commission is of the opinion that the information society can take root in developing countries only by looking at a broad spectrum of interrelated issues, information and communication technology (ICT) capacity development being one of the many aspects. It is important, however, to bear in mind that the impact of ICT on poor people and low income countries is not immediate. Billions of poor people do not have access to basic infrastructure like electricity and telephone lines, a precondition for profiting from new technologies.

The Commission is already active operationally in support of the information society in developing countries through its External relations and Development Directorates general (DGs), as well as its Information society DG. In particular the Commission has put in place a major ICT programme for the Mediterranean region, the Euro-Mediterranean information society initiative (Eumedis) which encompasses five strategic sectors (education, e-commerce, health, cultural heritage/tourism, industry/innovation) and includes a specific effort to improve the connectivity between the networks. Eumedis has a total budget of € 45 million. In addition, a specific project aiming at the modernisation of telecommunications regulatory frameworks in the same area has been launched with a budget of € 2.5 million.

A comprehensive programme for Asia, called Asia-ICT, is under implementation (total budget € 25 million). The general objective of the programme is to utilise fully the potential of information and communication technology for areas of particular relevance to the socio-economic development of Asian societies and countries and to assist in the integration of the participating countries in South and South East Asia into the global information society. It will improve the level of mutual comprehension, stimulate linkages and support the development of applications to priority sectors eg agriculture, education, health, transport, social fields, tourism, intelligent manufacturing and electronic commerce.

Action in this sector in Latin America is among the priorities decided by the Heads of State and government at the Rio summit in June 1999. The Commission is preparing a communication on the follow-up of the Rio summit.

In May 2000, the Commission signed a co-financing agreement for the African Virtual University (AVU) together with the World Bank and other donors. The AVU delivers teaching via the internet in various disciplines, including ICT education. The Community contribution of € 1.1 million is the only Community-funded activity in the African, Caribbean and Pacific region that covers ICT education (see:www.avu.org).